



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of November 19, 2023

Weekly Prayer

Thank you, God, for everything. Thank you for life, for relationships, for the resources I have received. Most of all, thank you for always being faithful and at work in my life. Help me to see my life and everything I have as a gift from you to be your hands and feet in this world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Monday, November 20

Scripture: Matthew 12:14-23

The Pharisees went out and met in order to find a way to destroy Jesus. Jesus knew what they intended to do, so he went away from there. Large crowds followed him, and he healed them all. But he ordered them not to spread the word about him, so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled:

*Look, my Servant whom I chose,
the one I love, in whom I find great pleasure.
I'll put my Spirit upon him,
and he'll announce judgment to the Gentiles.
He won't argue or shout,
and nobody will hear his voice in the streets.
He won't break a bent stalk,
and he won't snuff out a smoldering wick,
until he makes justice win.
And the Gentiles will put their hope in his name.*

They brought to Jesus a demon-possessed man who was blind and unable to speak. Jesus healed him so that he could both speak and see. All the crowds were amazed and said, "This man couldn't be the Son of David, could he?"

Observation

Jesus' enemies were plotting to destroy him. Jesus just moved elsewhere and continued to serve and heal. Matthew quoted Isaiah 42:1-4 to describe Jesus' approach: "He won't argue or shout, and nobody will hear his voice in the streets. He won't break a bent stalk, and he won't snuff out a smoldering wick, until he makes justice win." We might think

that's no way to make justice win. But people respected Jesus, even asking if he might be "the Son of David," a title for the Messiah.

Application

Just before today's reading, Matthew showed the Pharisees criticizing Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, which they saw as work. How did Jesus' way of dealing with his foes live out the attitude Isaiah said God's servant would have? Have you ever seen a situation where it was more effective to withdraw or speak gently rather than trying to loudly prove a contentious point?

Prayer

O Jesus, you walked this earth, not as an arrogant, demanding ruler, but as a gentle, healing servant. Guide me as I seek to live into your brand of greatness. Amen.

Tuesday, November 21

Scripture: Matthew 20:20-28

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus along with her sons. Bowing before him, she asked a favor of him. "What do you want?" he asked. She responded, "Say that these two sons of mine will sit, one on your right hand and one on your left, in your kingdom." Jesus replied, "You don't know what you're asking! Can you drink from the cup that I'm about to drink from?"

They said to him, "We can." He said to them, "You will drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left hand isn't mine to give. It belongs to those for whom my Father prepared it." Now when the other ten disciples heard about this, they became angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them over and said, "You know that those who rule the Gentiles show off their authority over them and their high-ranking officials order them around. But that's not the way it will be with you. Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant. Whoever wants to be first among you will be your slave— just as the Human One didn't come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people."

Observation

James and John (and probably their mom, though Mark left her out in his version of the story in Mark 10:35-45) thought they'd get their bid for power in before the other disciples. Jesus kept talking about his kingdom. Well, weren't "kingdoms" about seeking places of power? "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. In the Kingdom of Heaven, there is no status seeking. In my Kingdom, we serve.

Application

We have a good idea (as did James and John) what power, privilege and importance look like. Down deep, most of us wish for some of the perks that go with power. But Jesus' view was succinct and direct: "that's not the way it will be with you." Jesus said he didn't come

to be served, but to serve, and even give his life. In what specific ways does living like Jesus change your approach to life?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I thank you that your love's transforming power can motivate me to live a servant life. Teach me how to treat others as you treat me. Amen.

Wednesday, November 22

Scripture: Matthew 23:5-12

Everything they do, they do to be noticed by others. They make extra-wide prayer bands for their arms and long tassels for their clothes. They love to sit in places of honor at banquets and in the synagogues. They love to be greeted with honor in the markets and to be addressed as 'Rabbi.' "But you shouldn't be called *Rabbi*, because you have one teacher, and all of you are brothers and sisters. Don't call anybody on earth your father, because you have one Father, who is heavenly. Don't be called *teacher*, because Christ is your one teacher. But the one who is greatest among you will be your servant. All who lift themselves up will be brought low. But all who make themselves low will be lifted up.

Observation

In Jesus' day (and still today), many leaders (even religious ones) sought exalted, lofty titles. Scholar William Barclay wrote, "The Pharisees liked to be addressed as Rabbi and to be treated with the greatest respect. They even claimed ... greater respect than that given to parents, for, they said, a man's parents give him ordinary, physical life, but a man's teacher gives him eternal life." By contrast, Jesus said his Kingdom was not about high-status titles, but about greatness in serving others.

Application

Scholar N. T. Wright noted that the Pharisees were not just religious, but also political and social leaders. He asked, "What are today's equivalents? Some might be the leaders, elected or unelected, in our wider societies, who ... rejoice in their 'celebrity' status, make grand pronouncements about public values while running lucrative but shady businesses on the side, use their position to gain influence for their families and friends, and allow their private interests secretly to determine the public policy of their country ... What matters is the huge and humbling principle of verses 11 and 12." How easy or hard do you find it to lay aside human ideas of greatness in favor of Jesus' definition of greatness as service?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, keep purifying my motivations as I serve. May my meaning and sense of worth come more from you each day—until my service is about you, not me. Amen.

Thursday, November 23, Thanksgiving Day

Scripture: Psalm 136:1-9

Give thanks to the LORD because he is good.

God's faithful love lasts forever!

Give thanks to the God of all gods—

God's faithful love lasts forever.

Give thanks to the Lord of all lords—

God's faithful love lasts forever.

Give thanks to the only one who makes great wonders—

God's faithful love lasts forever.

Give thanks to the one who made the skies with skill—

God's faithful love lasts forever.

Give thanks to the one who shaped the earth on the water—

God's faithful love lasts forever.

Give thanks to the one who made the great lights—

God's faithful love lasts forever.

The sun to rule the day—

God's faithful love lasts forever.

The moon and the stars to rule the night—

God's faithful love lasts forever!

Observation

The psalmist located the center of our gratitude to God in the refrain he repeated over and over in this psalm: "God's faithful love lasts forever!" Above all else, the grand story of the Bible is the story of a God who loves us with a tireless, durable, embracing, never-ending love. What a promise! "Give thanks to the Lord" indeed!

Application

The New Bible Commentary said God's "status would by itself inspire awe; his creative works, marvel; his power evident in history, submission; his goodness, gratitude. But when we see that all these greatnesses spring from an unchanging love which delights to manifest power in mercy and provision, then the Lord is truly acknowledged with wonder, love, and praise." Savor those words, and how they apply to your walk with God: awe, marvel, submission, gratitude, wonder, love, and praise. What moments, events or relationships have made God's unchanging, faithful love most real for you?

Have a joyous Thanksgiving Day! In whatever way you mark the day, and with whomever, consider reading this psalm, or singing a favorite thanksgiving song, as a way of deepening your sense of gratitude on this day.

Prayer

Lord God, in "wonder, love and praise" I thank you that all you do in my life springs "from an unchanging love which delights to manifest power in mercy and provision." Amen.

Friday, November 24

Scripture: Galatians 5:13-16

You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only don't let this freedom be an opportunity to indulge your selfish impulses, but serve each other through love. All the Law has been fulfilled in a single statement: *Love your neighbor as yourself*. But if you bite and devour each other, be careful that you don't get eaten up by each other! I say be guided by the Spirit and you won't carry out your selfish desires.

Observation

The Apostle Paul started new churches in Galatia (modern day Turkey), but they had fallen into disagreement and struggle. False teachers came to the churches and began convincing them they still had to follow certain rules and laws in order for God to accept them. Paul's letter resisted the false teachers. He urged his readers to claim their freedom in Christ, but to use that freedom to "love your neighbor as yourself."

Application

In verse 13 Paul bluntly stated a truth that can be painful to admit. We all have selfish impulses, especially when given the ability to choose freely. He pointed his readers to the one who can give us the ability to live out the Golden Rule: the Holy Spirit. Paul said, "Be guided by the Spirit and you won't carry out your selfish desires" (verse 16). In what areas of your life do you want to invite the Spirit to empower you to deny your selfish desires and love your neighbor as yourself more fully?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you came to set me free. I like being free from other people's demands, and from bad things. Help me also value the times when you set me free from my own self-centeredness. Amen.

Saturday, November 25

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

"Now when the Human One comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his majestic throne. All the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate them from each other, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right side. But the goats he will put on his left. "Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.' "Then those who are righteous will reply to him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' "Then the king will reply to them, 'I assure you

that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.' "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Get away from me, you who will receive terrible things. Go into the unending fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels. I was hungry and you didn't give me food to eat. I was thirsty and you didn't give me anything to drink. I was a stranger and you didn't welcome me. I was naked and you didn't give me clothes to wear. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me.' "Then they will reply, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and didn't do anything to help you?' Then he will answer, 'I assure you that when you haven't done it for one of the least of these, you haven't done it for me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment. But the righteous ones will go into eternal life."

Observation

After talking about the Temple's destruction and the end of the world (in sometimes puzzling terms), Jesus gave a word picture of the final judgment. His story about the judgment clearly conveyed his Kingdom's priorities. Kingdom people, he said, care for the hungry and thirsty, the poorly-clothed and strangers, the prisoners and the sick—the people whom Jesus called "the least of these brothers and sisters of mine."

Application

There's a Christian song that begins, "I met Jesus today, and I really must tell you, he didn't look at all like the pictures ... He was a hungry child, a sick friend of mine, a stranger who needed a coat." In Jesus' story, both those accepted and the ones who were turned away were surprised. They expected to meet Jesus in "religious" places, with choirs and lights, not in the streets among the needy and poor. But Jesus' story said we should notice all people in need of help and treat them as if it were Jesus himself in need. In what ways can you sense God reshaping your attitudes toward "the least of these" in your community and the wider world?

Prayer

King Jesus, show me the "least of these" in my wealthy neighbor who struggles emotionally or spiritually, my poor friend who suffers financially, my sick friend who needs your comfort while dying—and in myself, who needs more of you in my life. Amen.